

**WRECKAGE OF THE R.A.A.F. BOMBER**, which crashed yesterday at Arthur's Seat, Dromana, killing four of the crew, including the pilot, and injuring one. Two pictures of the wreckage show the smashed engine and twisted fuselage.

MELBOURNE PAPER 11.8.38

# Sons and lovers lost in the mist

*BUSH regenerates, hiding all scars. It is hard to see where the planes came down on the hill, though it is said that pieces of metal can still be found by those who know where to look. This is a place for outings and picnics, for a sit in the sun or a ride on the chair-lift. Tour buses park near a cafe; people take pictures of the bay.*

*Few are aware of the twin tragedies that occurred within a few hundred metres of the summit. Two planes. Two crashes. Eight lives cut short. That was then; this is now. But sometimes past and present come together like lovers meeting again after being separated by the years . . .*

**V**IVIAN MAUNDRELL was 17; her boyfriend, Bob, was 28. She lived in East Malvern and had a job in the city with a dispensing chemist. He was in the air force, a fitter with the RAAF's Number 2 squadron. He was a very quiet fellow, a perfect gentleman from a famous family: his uncle was Sir Douglas Mawson, the scientist and Antarctic explorer. His name was Robert but she called him Bob. Bob Mawson.

She had known him for about a year. He had talked about marriage but, although she wore a ring he gave her, she thought she was too young for that. On Tuesday 9 August 1938, they had a night out; Bob and Vivian and a few friends. Bob seemed unusually apprehensive about a flight he was due to make early the next morning. When Vivian said goodnight, he said he was worried.

The next afternoon, Vivian and her girlfriend, Gladys, were heading home. They heard *The Herald* boys calling out something about a plane crash on the Mornington Peninsula, but it wasn't until they read a paper on the tram that they realised what had happened. An RAAF Avro Anson A4-29, a relatively new plane, had crashed on Arthurs Seat, near Dromana, shortly before 10 that morning. Four of the five crewmen were dead. One was Bob Mawson.

She sat on the tram heading for East Malvern, wearing her flying boy's ring. Shock made it hard to comprehend what the paper was telling her. And then she recalled Bob's premonition.

Vivian and Gladys were the only mourners at the RAAF

**FOUR KILLED IN AIR TRAGEDY**  
**BOMBER CRASHES INTO MOUNTAIN**  
**ONE OF CREW ESCAPES**

The wreckage of a large Avro Anson bomber, which crashed on Arthurs Seat, near Dromana, yesterday morning.

The bomber was heard shouting in the bushes, and a man was seen to descend the hill from the wreckage. A trail of broken glass and scattered fragments of the machine indicated that it had flown straight into the hill.

**KILLED**  
 Pilot: ROBERT STANLEY SYMONDS, 22 years, Melbourne, Victoria, S.A. (brother of the rescuer).  
 Sergeant: JOHN MCMAHON GILLESPIE, 28 years, West Melbourne, Victoria.  
 Sergeant: ROBERT CAMPBELL GILLESPIE, 23 years, West Melbourne, Victoria.  
 Sergeant: ROBERT WINDHAM MAWSON, 28 years, at Melbourne, Victoria.

**WRECKAGE OF BOMBER AMONG TREES**



**MERCY FIRE RESCUE**    **"SCRAMBLE FOR ACTIVITY IN SPAIN"**    **MENACE TO CZECHS.**

Mother Perishes    Unusually cool

AGE 7.11  
5.7.95

remembers a large wreath from Sir Douglas and reporters wanting to know the names of herself and her girlfriend.

Also on board the Avro Anson, which had left Laverton aerodrome early that morning on navigation and reconnaissance exercises, was Sergeant Pilot John McMahon Gillespie, of St Kilda. He was the navigator and, like Mawson, just 28. He died not knowing that his young wife, Margaret, whom everyone knew as "Mick", was pregnant. Nine months after his death, his daughter, another Margaret, was born.

She is now Mrs Margaret McPherson of Hampton, a mother of five grown-up children. She knew her father only from photographs, which made him something of a fantasy figure. "I always thought he was a glamorous-looking person, a bit like a film star," she says. "But I was brought up in an extended household — with grandparents, aunts, and my mother — and as I'd never known my father, I couldn't miss not having one. Besides, at that time there were many fathers away at the war."

Her mother, who died a year ago, never spoke much about her husband or the crash that killed him. It was something lost in time; shrouded in mist, just as Arthurs Seat had been early that morning 57 years ago.

And then Peter Wilson from the Dromana and District Historical Society rang her just recently to tell her about a ceremony being held next Wednesday to commemorate that 1938 crash and another one four years later involving a Beaufort A9-64 bomber. Eight men killed on Arthurs Seat just a few kilometres and four years apart. One of them, her father, a man she never knew.

Peter Wilson showed her

lived for a little while."

*The Age* reported that people in Dromana had heard the Avro Anson go overhead, less than 500 feet up, but the mist was so thick that the plane couldn't be spotted. According to those first at the scene, only the pilot (Robert Stanley Symonds, 22) was dead when they arrived. Three of the victims, including John Gillespie, were still breathing but died before the local doctor arrived half an hour later.

It distressed Margaret McPherson to learn that her father had not died instantly. She was also struck by how terribly young the crew members had been: the only survivor of

the crash, AC1 James Glover, a rigger from Hawthorn, was 21. When found, he had suffered a cut chin but was conscious. He was demobbed in 1946, having risen to the rank of Flight Sergeant, and died in 1968.

Mrs McPherson says that the unexpected news of next week's ceremony, which is being held on the 53rd anniversary of the 1942 accident, also caused her to reassess things subsumed by the past. "I just hadn't thought about my father for such a long time," she says.

At first, she was ambivalent about attending the ceremony. Somewhat to her surprise, it was her own children who were enthusiastic about the event. And they pointed out to her that, as far as is known, she is the only child of any of the men who died in 1938.

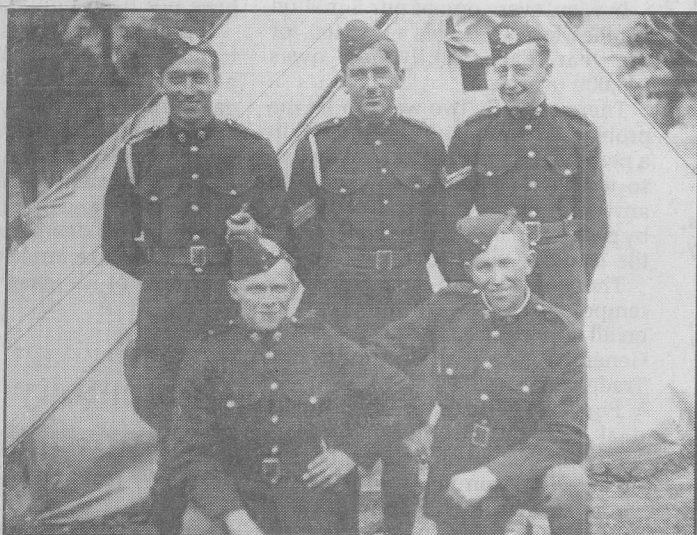
The ceremony, to be held on the summit of Arthurs Seat as part of the *Australia Remembers* program, will bring together strangers who share links to similar tragedies more than 50 years ago. Like Mrs McPherson, many of the relatives traced by Peter Wilson were shocked when he got in touch. But



ABOVE: The reflection of Margaret McPherson as she holds a picture of her father, Sergeant Pilot John McMahan Gillespie.

LEFT: Margaret McPherson's father (middle) pictured during his air force days. He lost his life in a crash at Arthurs Seat.

FAR LEFT: The 'glamorous-looking' father she never knew.



overdue. As Vivian Underwood says of the '38 crash: "It wasn't wartime, but the boys had joined up prepared to fight and were members of the permanent force."

Among those with family ties to the '42 crash — caused, like the earlier one, by poor visibility, with low cloud and fog over Arthurs Seat — there is also a sense that the tragedy was lost amongst all the other war-time news. *The Age* of 14 July 1942, which led with Allied forces standing firm south of Alamein, printed only a cursory report of the accident two days earlier in which four airmen were killed — a dramatic contrast with the

Grafton, NSW. He was 31 when he died. But to his daughter — now Mrs Phyllis Nebauer, of Old Bar, NSW — much about the accident was mysterious. After Peter Wilson got in touch, Phyllis's husband, Kevin Nebauer, told him: "It meant so much to Phyllis to finally have some hews and wheres for her father's death."

Another crew member of the Beaufort bomber was Sgt Dudley Merton Wehl, 22, from Capella, in Queensland. Peter Wilson's letter to the Capella postmaster, seeking information on descendants, was eventually passed on to Wehl's sister, Ian McDonald, in Mackay

ty. He was marking time after leaving school, waiting until he was old enough to enlist."

And then he was dead at 22; killed after the laden bomber lost in fog clipped a power line on the top of Arthurs Seat and crashed in a gully, burning fiercely and causing a series of explosions which shattered windows in nearby Dromana.

Letters such as those from the relatives of Charles Redgrave and Dudley Wehl have convinced Peter Wilson that he was right to seek a memorial to the crashes, long forgotten by most locals and, he discovered, unknown to many in the RAAF.

Wilson was an eight-year-old living in Dromana in 1938. He remembers nothing of that crash but recalls his older brother, Frank, sneaking up the hill for a look at the wreckage the day of the '42 crash. He went himself the following weekend, only to find the area cordoned off and under guard.

There are already plenty of plaques on Arthurs Seat, which also has — belatedly — a navigation facility on the summit

marking the two air crashes on the landmark 90 minutes from Melbourne. Jeremy Lee, a nephew of Flying Officer Terry Elcoate, the 24-year-old pilot of the Beaufort, recalls visiting Arthurs Seat often as a boy. His mother would say that her brother had died there in the war, but there was no memorial.

That will change next Wednesday when a plaque will be unveiled on the hill top and a bugler plays the Last Post and Reveille. Jeremy Lee, whose children are much the same age as the young men who died, will be there. So too his cousins, who share the pilot's name.

Vivian Underwood, nee Maundrell, of Mornington, doesn't really need to be present. For there is a strange sequel to the story of her RAAF fitter.

A few years after he died, just for something different, she visited a fortune teller — a medium — in a little terrace house in Prahran. He told her, without prompting, that she'd had a friend killed in a crash. He had become her guardian angel.